DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 143 SO 034 565

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TITLE	Young Children's Construction of Understanding about Families and Citizenship using Storypath.
PUB DATE	2002-11-00
NOTE	19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Phoenix, AZ, November 20-22, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship Responsibility; Classroom Research; *Constructivism (Learning); Cross Cultural Studies; *Family (Sociological Unit); Focus Groups; Foreign Countries; Grade 1; Primary Education; *Social Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the background procedure and outcomes of a study of two Year 1 classrooms, one in Seattle, Washington, and the other in Sydney, Australia, that engaged in the constructivist learning experiences of a social studies unit, "Families in Their Neighborhoods" (McGuire, 1997). The unit employed the "Storypath" planning and teaching strategy. Each classroom teacher implemented the unit to enable children to construct understandings about families, including their diversity of structures, heritages, and designations of roles and responsibilities. The experiences implemented and explored in this unit were: (1)developing understandings of the ways in which families live within and (2) citizenship responsibilities for constructing neighborhoods or communities. This paper presents analyses of student interview data, work samples, and classroom displays to describe the nature and level of understandings constructed by the students in each of the research sites. Some cross-cultural comparisons are drawn. Implications of using the Storypath strategy as both a powerful constructivist tool for enhancing students' understandings and citizenship responsibilities are made. Appended are observation notes and focus group interview questions. (Contains 5 tables, 3 figures, 8 notes, and 23 references.) (Author/BT)

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Young children's construction of understandings about families and citizenship using Storypath.

ED 479 143

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at

SO 034 565

2002 Conference of the College and University Faculty Assembly
Phoenix, November 20 - 22, 2002

This paper acknowledges the support of Ashcroft P.S., NSW, Australia and Beacon Hill Elementary School, Seattle, USA

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Abstract

This paper presents the background, procedure and outcomes of a study of two Year 1 classrooms, one in Seattle, U.S.A., and the other in Sydney, Australia, who engaged in the constructivist learning experiences of a Social Studies unit titled "Families in their Neighborhoods" (McGuire, 1997). The unit employed the Storypath planning and teaching strategy.

The teacher of each classroom implemented the unit to enable children to construct understandings about families, including their diversity of structures, heritages and designations of roles and responsibilities. Experiences for developing understandings of the ways in which families live within, as well as have citizenship responsibilities for constructing neighbourhoods, or communities, were implemented and explored in the unit. This paper presents analyses of students' interview data, their worksamples and classroom displays to describe the nature and level of understandings constructed by the students in each of the research sites. Some cross cultural comparisons are drawn. Implications of using the Storypath strategy as both a "powerful" (NCSS, 1993), constructivist tool for enhancing students' understandings and citizenship responsibilities are made.

"Education must prepare individuals for life in democratic societies by helping learners accept the rights and responsibilities they have as citizens (CIDREE/UNESCO, 1993).

Introduction

In both the United States of America and Australia elementary Social Studies, or Studies of Society and Environment, syllabus aims or goals commonly denote social and environmental understandings and participatory citizenship as central outcomes (Brophy and Alleman, 1996; Commission on Student Learning, 1996; National Council for the Social Studies, 1994; Board of Studies NSW, 1998; Social Education Association of Australia, 1990). Likewise, the topic of families is generally a subject matter inclusion in both USA and Australia elementary syllabus documents. Units of work, titled "Families" are commonly investigated by children in Grade 1 Social Studies classrooms in both countries. What elementary students know about families and how they construct and extend their knowledge and understandings about families and families' citizenship responsibilities were the focus of this study.

Since 1997, the Federal Government of Australia has been supporting the inclusion of civics and citizenship education in the primary[1] and secondary school curriculum (Kemp, 1997). Whilst substantial resources have been produced and distributed to classroom teachers throughout Australia, most have focussed on enhancing the civic knowledge and citizenship dispositions of children in Years 4 through 10 (Curriculum Corporation, 1998). Relatively little support has been given to strengthening civics and citizenship learning opportunities for young elementary children. Similarly, reviews of Social Studies curriculum in the U.S.A. have assessed much of the content as trite and unlikely to engage children in grades K-3 in opportunities for developing civic efficacy (Brophy & Alleman, 1996).

Consistent is a pervasive assumption that young children are incapable of grappling with broader civics and citizenship issues and understandings, despite several findings that support the contrary. Flexibility, open-mindedness, and tolerance of unfamiliar ideas are

[1] "The terms "elementary" and "primary" are used interchangeably throughout the paper with elementary connoting the USA context and "primary" the Australian context.

evidenced in the thinking of four- to eight-year olds. (Joyce, 1970). Young children frequently explore and attempt to understand their social and political contexts (Seefeldt, 1993) and demonstrate awareness of rules in these contexts (Dockett & Perry, in press). They also have a strong sense of their own identity and talk about this in ways that show cognisance of "multiple citizenships" (Dockett, Woods, Cusack & Perry, 2000).

Values educators and developmental psychologists remind us that dispositions develop at very early ages. Learning the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for citizenship in a democratic society should begin in the early grades. However, citizenship education in younger elementary grades often is reduced to lessons on following the rules or reading stories about community helpers. Children living in a democratic society deserve richer and more powerful citizenship lessons. Developmentally we know that young children need a variety of direct experiences to develop cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially. To develop civic efficacy--the readiness and willingness to assume citizenship responsibilities--young learners must practice the role of citizen in a context that is meaningful and memorable.

The topic of "families" enables young children to investigate one of the basic and familiar, yet most complex societal structures. The "neighbourhood" provides a microcosm for observing and understanding citizenship responsibilities that are developmentally appropriate for young children. It also provides the context within which young children are most likely to practice their citizenship learnings.

Contemporary approaches for teaching Social Studies in the United States of America (U.S.A.) and in Australia mostly reflect constructivist views of learning (see, for example, Brophy, 1990; Brophy & Alleman, 1996; Hamston & Murdoch, 1996; Kaltsounis, 1994). Haberman (1991) argues that students in poverty need learning experiences that are relevant to their daily lives and that engage them with real problems. The Storypath strategy, as described below, employs a constructivist approach to teaching whilst engaging children in a narrative that enables them to find relevance in their learning. For these reasons the Storypath strategy was deemed appropriate for the research as a teaching strategy. Further,it was a vehicle for enabling students to develop and demonstrate their own understandings about the topic of families and citizenship as well as a pedagogy that could be employed with some consistency across the two sites and through which the researchers could employ co-researching methodology for data collection and analysis.

The Storypath strategy is grounded in a belief that students learn best when they are active participants in their own learning, and places students' own efforts to understand at the centre of the educational enterprise. It originated in Scotland in the 1960s as a response, by a group of researchers and experienced teachers, to a desire to help children make sense of their world as a connected whole rather than as a set of separate experiences or subjects (McGuire, 1997). It has since been implemented in several northern European countries including Netherlands and Denmark, as well as in the United States and Canada and, more recently, in Australia. Essentially, Storypath draws on theorising about the power of narrative to engage the human mind and create meaning from experiences (Bruner, 1965, 1990; Egan, 1988). It uses the story structure: a setting, cast of characters, a way of life and plot inclusive of critical incidents which must be dealt with, to organise salient Social Studies content into meaningful and memorable learning experiences. Students and teachers have complimentary roles in the ultimate construction of the learning path. Teacher planned "critical incidences" are strategically introduced into the story to challenge students' previous experiences and knowledge, and to engage

them in inquiry and problem solving. Incident resolutions enable students to construct new, deeper understandings and to make decisions about their social, cultural and environmental world. However, because the students are active participants and decision makers in the learning experiences they also become partial determiners of both the story's plot and the direction of their learning.

Research describing young elementary students' development of key Social Studies concepts and understandings have been relatively scant (Brophy & Alleman, 2000), yet decisions about subject matter appropriate for investigation by young school children are made regularly by national and state curriculum planners and by teachers. The *Families in their Neighborhood* Storypath unit had been implemented by both researchers in several classrooms. Whilst each researcher had obtained data pertaining to both the unit's "power"[2] for encouraging young students' construction of deep social understandings about families and community citizenship responsibilities, and the general success of the Storypath strategy in engaging students in learning, such data had been largely anecdotal (Rupp Fulwiler & McGuire, 1997). The central aim of this study, therefore, was to systematically collect and analyse qualitative data from the teachers and students of Year 1 classrooms, in Seattle and in Sydney, who participated in the teaching and learning experiences of the Storypath unit *Families in their Neighborhood* for evidence of students' development of knowledge and understandings about families and their engagement in learning. The nature of students' understandings about families, their structures, heritages, designations of roles and responsibilities and the ways in which families live within, as well as have citizenship responsibilities for constructing neighbourhoods, or communities, were explored within and across the two study sites. Some possible salient factors influencing the children's understandings were also explored.

Methodology

Sample

Year 1 classrooms, similar in comprising culturally diverse, lower socio-economic student populations and teachers who ascribed to social constructivist approaches to teaching, were selected in both Seattle and Sydney. The Seattle classroom comprised 17 students, with representation from 7 ethnic groups. The Sydney classroom comprised 26 students with representation from ten ethnic groups (see Table 1). Ten students in the Seattle classroom were on free or reduced lunch programs, whilst the Sydney classroom was in a school that attracted Priority Schools Funding because of the socio-economic disadvantage of the school community. In the classroom selection process classes were matched also, and as closely as possible, for family structure, in particular, the presence, or not, of both parents in the students' homes. Children's understandings about family structure were deemed a salient variable in the study, and it was anticipated that they would likely draw on their home experiences. Ten students (58%) in the Seattle classroom were in families in which both parents lived together, whilst 12 students (46%) in the Sydney classroom had both parents residing in the family home.

[2] The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 1993) describes "powerful" Social Studies as meaningful, integrative, challenging, value-based and active.

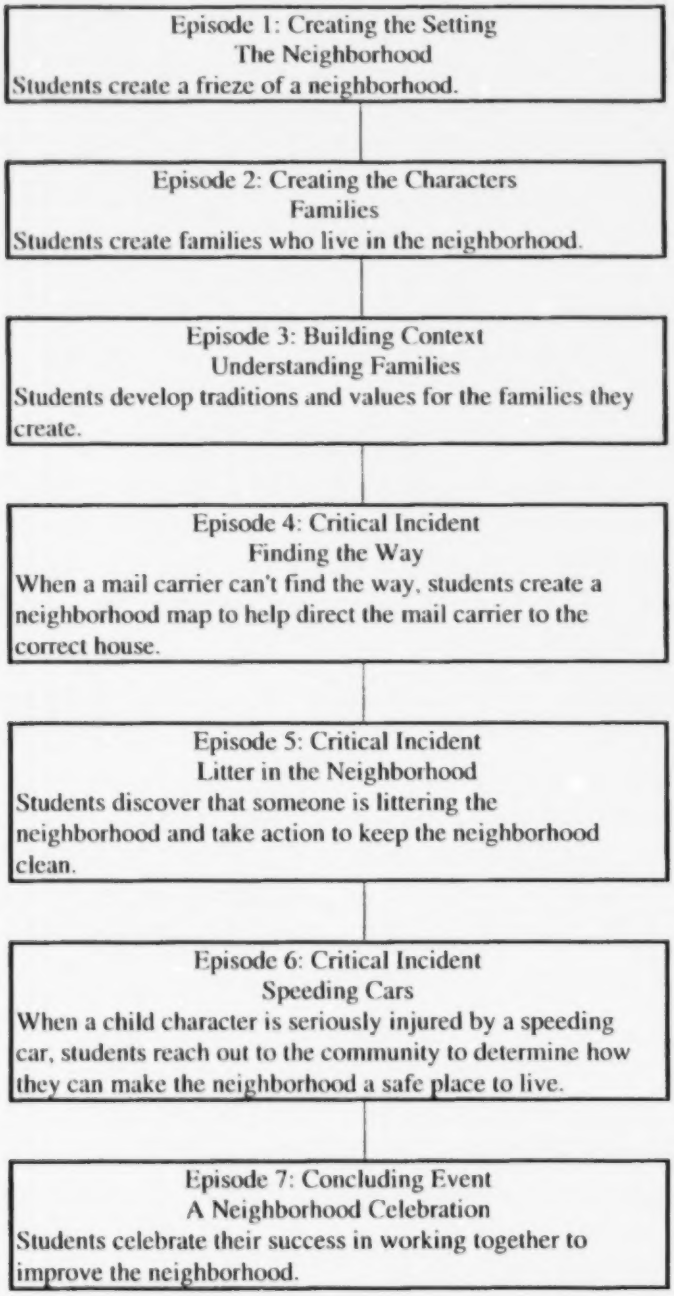
Table 1
Ethnic Background of Students in Each of the Classrooms

Ethnic Background	Number of Seattle Students	Number of Sydney Students
Arabic		3
Caucasian	5	9
Chinese	3	3
Ethiopian	1	
Hispanic	4	
Indian		1
Indigenous Australian		3
Italian		1
Japanese	2	
Lebanese		1
Philippine		1
Samoan		2
Vietnamese	1	2
Unknown	1	

Data Collection
Data collection was undertaken in several ways. Essentially, a co-researching methodology that utilised classroom observations and discussions between the non-teaching, university-based researchers and the co-researching classroom teachers, as well as focus group interviews with students, were employed at both sites. Data were also obtained from student worksamples, namely the family portraits, values shields and bibliographies, the developing classroom frieze and students' writing samples that indicated responses to critical incidences, the citizenship application opportunities, in the Storypath.

Both non-teaching researchers observed the sequence of teaching and learning episodes in the *Families in Their Neighborhood* Storypath unit, shown in summary form in Figure 1. Ethnographic memoing was completed by the non-teaching researchers during the observations. Memo notes focussed on students' demonstrations of understandings and on their cooperation and engagement. Appendix 1 provides an example of memo notes. Observations were followed by discussions between the respective co-researching teachers, and the non-teaching researchers. Student responses recorded on class charts as well as student worksamples completed during episodes were photographed.

Figure 1
Episodes of *Families in Their Neighborhood* Storypath[3]


Episode 1: Creating the Setting
The Neighborhood
Students create a frieze of a neighborhood.
Episode 2: Creating the Characters
Families
Students create families who live in the neighborhood.
Episode 3: Building Context
Understanding Families
Students develop traditions and values for the families they create.
Episode 4: Critical Incident
Finding the Way
When a mail carrier can't find the way, students create a neighborhood map to help direct the mail carrier to the correct house.
Episode 5: Critical Incident
Litter in the Neighborhood
Students discover that someone is littering the neighborhood and take action to keep the neighborhood clean.
Episode 6: Critical Incident
Speeding Cars
When a child character is seriously injured by a speeding car, students reach out to the community to determine how they can make the neighborhood a safe place to live.
Episode 7: Concluding Event
A Neighborhood Celebration
Students celebrate their success in working together to improve the neighborhood.

[3] • McGuire, M.E. (1997) Families in Their Neighborhood. Chicago: Everyday Learning Corporation.

Focus group interviews with students at the conclusion of the unit enabled the researchers to validate and supplement the observation and worksample data on students' understandings, as well as to explore possible influencing factors. As students had worked in cooperative pairs, or triads, to become a "family" throughout the unit, interviews were held with the members of each "family". Each "family" brought their worksamples to the interviews to assist with their recall and explanations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the non-teaching researchers. The contents of the interviews were discussed with the co-researching teachers. Appendix 2 provides the focus group interview questions.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analysis involved each of the non-teaching researchers developing initial codes, based on themes evident in their memo notes, the students' work samples and the interview transcripts. Following electronic exchange of the memo notes, photographs and interview summaries, further coding was completed as both common and discrete themes emerged across the two sets of data. Coded data were explored and analysed in descriptive tabulations. Resultant propositions were refined in a manner similar to Glaser and Strauss's analytical induction method (cited in Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995).

Results

Results indicated that there was much commonality across the two research sites in the students' responses to the tasks and interviews, and in the understandings demonstrated by the children. The students in both research sites constructed a diverse range of "families"[4] but did not necessarily draw on their own families as models for their constructions. They also, generally, did not reflect their own diverse ethnic backgrounds in the activities or celebrations ascribed to their "families" nor to the foods of their "family" members. Rather, the common pattern was that the children drew on their experiences in their home neighbourhood and presented a child's perspective in their understandings of families and citizenship. There was some evidence of gender and ethnic stereotyping amongst the understandings. Teachers in both classrooms attributed development in the students' cooperation and on-task behaviour to the ownership of learning that children felt when learning through the Storypath approach. Details of the results are reported under key themes.

Family structures

Observations of the students' brainstorming of family members who could live together showed consistency across the two study classrooms. The students initially recalled members of the nuclear family such as mother, father, sister, brother, children, baby and twins. With prompting through strategic teacher questioning they included extended family members such as grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. It was only after more sustained questioning from the teachers that step-parents were listed, yet several students in both classrooms lived with step-parents.

Analysis of the portraits constructed by the "families", summarised in Table 2, demonstrated inclusion of a variety of people who could live together in a family, at both research sites. This diversity feature is possibly a reflection of the diverse family structures evident in the students' home neighbourhoods, but not a reflection of their own particular families. In all but three of the nineteen "families" across the two research sites (i.e. 16%) the constructed "families" had a mother and father living together. However,

[4] Inverted commas are used to distinguish the Storypath families from the children's personal families.

approximately 50% of the children do not have this membership pattern in their own family homes. Common amongst the "families" was the inclusion of extended family members such as grandparents or cousins. Whilst single-parent with child(ren) families were certainly evident amongst the students' own families in both research sites, there was no constructed "family" with just a single significant adult and just one had unrelated family members.[5]

Table 2
Structures of the Storypath "Families"

Types of families	Seattle	Sydney
Two parent + children	3	7
Single parent + children		
Single parent + children + grandparent	1	2
Two parent + children + grandparent + cousin	1	1
Two parent + children + grandparent(s)	1	
Two parent + children + cousin(s)	2	
Unrelated		1

Children drew on the names of their own family relatives, school teaching staff, and make-believe or television families when naming their "family" and their individual "family" members. For example, whilst in the final constructions Simpson's was not used by any "family", this family name, plus the first names of all Simpson's characters, were amongst the earliest mentioned names for the brainstorm list in the Sydney classroom. Television names used for the "families" in the two neighbourhoods were Teletubbies, Richie-Rich and Alakazoo. In contrast, there was one Chinese family name used amongst the Seattle "families" and one Chinese and one Vietnamese name used in the Sydney "families", despite there being several students of these and other ethnic backgrounds in each class.

When interviewed about their Storypath "families" students in the Sydney classroom gave one of three reasons for the structures of their "families": they constructed their families to *"be normal"*; it was *"just because we wanted it that way"*; or they responded to the cooperative task by dividing the labour and creating a shared, constructed family as shown in the following comment, *"Well, I created and named these two and well, Student X, he just made those two."* Students did not respond that they had tried to construct their own families. Further, when asked whether their Storypath "families" were similar to their own families the children made distinctions on family size, such as *"No, my family has 5 but this family has 4"*, or membership such as inclusion of a grandparent or pet, *"No, my grandmother lives with me,"* or *"No, we don't have a cat"*[6]. When probed about whether all their Storypath "family" members lived together, the response was always "yes". In summary, the students certainly understood that families could have diverse

[5] Further subsequent research, using this unit, has revealed similar patterns of family construction amongst the students.

[6] Pets were a strong feature in the Sydney neighbourhood construction, in discussions about why the students valued their neighbourhood and were created as family members.

structures and compositions but demonstrated preferences for the "norm" when given the opportunity to design a family.[7]

Family Activities

Data from the "families" values shields and from "family" members' biographies were analysed for the students' understandings about family activities. Whilst there were a large number of activities nominated by students, those included in their shields were almost devoid of activities that could be related to students' ethnic backgrounds. Common across both settings was the designation of activities in which the students themselves participated, such as: going to movies; playing sports, playing with family members; going on trips or picnics; and playing with children's toys (see Table 3). Many of these activities were mentioned also in "family" members' biographies as things the characters liked to do. This does not mean that students ascribed age inappropriate activities to characters, but rather that there was overlap amongst the activities listed for individual family members and those depicted on the family values shields, and these were children's favourites. For example, going to the beach, reading together, playing with family members such as the baby or going to the movies are all activities that adults often share with children.

Table 3
Family Activities

Family Activities	Seattle	Sydney
Birthday parties		1
Colouring in		1
Going to the club		1
Going on picnics		2
Going on trips	2	
Going to the movies	1	2
Playing cards		2
Playing sports		
- volleyball		1
- tennis	1	
- tetherball	3	
- soccer	1	1
- baseball	1	
- swimming (beach going)	3	5
- rock climbing	1	
- fishing		1
- jump rope	1	
Playing Barbies	1	
Playing Pokemonn	1	
Swinging	1	
Bike riding		1
Scooter riding		1
Playing with family members	4	1
Reading together	1	1
Walking the dog		1
Watching videos	1	1

[7] Similar findings have been recorded in follow up study with new classes in the same school districts in Sydney and Seattle in 2002.

Similarly, students in both sites consistently selected mainstream holidays for celebrations that families valued and in which families participated (See table 4). Given that this unit was done before and after Christmas in Seattle and after the Christmas period in Sydney, one would expect that Christmas would be a holiday identified and it was. However, as the co-researching teachers brainstormed with students the range of holiday options, they still focussed on the mainstream holidays of the United States and Australia. After considerable discussion and probing by the teacher, the USA students identified Chinese New Years. Students in Sydney initially had trouble distinguishing the notion of a holiday from going on vacation, possibly because the unit was completed just after their long Christmas school break. However, as in the Seattle classroom, when the Sydney students understood the concept of public holidays and subsequently brainstormed, they listed mainstream Christian or national holidays, despite many of the students being from non-Christian backgrounds. The Sydney students' confusion over the word "holiday" was demonstrated in their values shields, and is evident in Table 4 which summarises the holidays identified in the family values shields.

Table 4
Holidays Valued by "Families"

Important Holidays	**Seattle**	**Sydney**
Christmas	7	4
Easter	1	2
Australia Day		1
Going to the beach		2
Play cards		1
Going fishing		1

In specifying family members' occupations there was a dominance of "helping roles", such as police officer, fireman (sic), mailman(sic) and cleaner given to the "fathers", in both settings. Sydney students were very much influenced by a series of pictures of "People who help us", labelled and on display in their classroom These students demonstrated little evidence of gender stereotyping. Several "...ers" were assigned as staying at home to look after children or having no job, but a few were described as police officers and a teacher. In contrast, only one Seattle "family" assigned an occupation to a "mother" role. There was some evidence of covert ethnic stereotyping in both sites as students negotiated aspects of "family" members' biographies. For example, lower paying jobs such as cleaners and Pizza Hut deliverers were assigned to members born in non-English speaking countries such as Lebanon or Fiji in the Sydney "families", or Mexico in the Seattle families. The exchange presented in Figure 2, recorded in the Seattle classroom, suggests that students' thinking on ethnicity may be well formed by Grade 1.

Figure 2
Seymour Bibliography Discussion

Seymour Family: The two boys are discussing the dad's role in their Storypath family:
Student 1 *The dad was born in Texas.*
Student 2: *He doesn't look like he was born in Texas.*
Researcher: *How do people look who are born in Texas?*
Student 2: *Like cowboys.*
Student 1: *He was born in Mexico.*
Researcher: *You decide where the dad was born, work together to decide where the dad was born.*
Student 1: *He looks like he was born in Mexico.*
Researcher: *Where does the dad work?*
Student 1: *He delivers pizza.*
Student 2: *He works in an office.*
Student 1: *He can't work in an office.*
Researcher: *Why can't he work in an office?*
Student 1: *Because people from Mexico can't work in an office. They just don't.*
Researcher: *I think that people from Mexico can work in an office, but you need to decide together where the dad works.*

Clearly, one student was covertly expressing an ethnic stereotype even when the second student tried to persuade him differently.

Family Foods
As with the students' selections of family activities their selections of family foods were also devoid of foods that could be related to ethnic backgrounds. In the Seattle classroom foods mentioned included pumpkin pie, chicken, pizza, junk food, macaroni and cheese, and hamburger. One family mentioned fried rice as a favourite food. In the Sydney classroom chicken, take-away foods such as pizza, hamburgers, KFC, McDonalds or Chinese, sweets such as ice-creams, chocolates (including M&Ms), and lollipops, as well as fruit were common. One family mentioned lasagne and spaghetti. Across both sites, pizza was the most commonly mentioned food and in general, the foods were those that the children themselves preferred.

Family Heritage
The concept of family heritage was difficult for the students. Analysis of the biographies from the two research sites showed that students were more captivated with listing a variety of places of birth, mostly different for each family member and varying from the local hospital to other countries. They did not ascribe a common family origin to all members.

In the Seattle classroom the family values shields depicted state or country flags for the common "family" heritage but these did not necessarily match the places of birth in the family members' biographies. To clarify the concept of heritage, the Sydney teacher engaged in more sustained questioning to recall items of heritage in the students own family homes, as shown in the exchange in Figure 3. Individual "family" presentations of the completed shields to the "neighbourhood" therefore showed students drawing on their family experiences, prompted by the discussion, and making connections with families having important possessions. Two "families" drew dragon statues; one drawn with Chinese writing by a student of Chinese heritage and explained as recognising "we're from China" and the other to show Samoan background. One "family" drew a penguin

statue, because the "family" likes the aquarium, another drew a special picture of God, another a gold coin with an eagle and one a jewel necklace, these latter three items being in students' own families. Other "families" drew family activities or items such as the car. It was interesting to the researcher that none of the indigenous students drew items specific to their heritage.

Figure 3
Class Discussion about Family Heritage Items

Researcher: Class discussion : Focus on family heritage for the "families" – children had been suggesting items such as cars.
Teacher: *Does anyone have something in their own home that their family thinks is very important just to their family?*
Student 1: *A statue of a dragon*
Teacher: Yes. *That's good. Why does your family think the dragon statue is important?*
Student 1*: Because we're from China.*
Teacher: *Does anyone else have a statue or something important in their home?*
Student 2: *A picture of God.*
Teacher: *Good. Is it a picture of God or Jesus?*
Student 2: *God*
Teacher: *Okay. That's because your family thinks God is important. Did anyone get something special with the newspaper yesterday?*
Student 3: *A gold coin.*
Teacher: *What was on the coin?.... Why might that coin be important to keep?*

Family and citizenship
Observations of the resolutions of the critical incidences, discussions with the co-researching teachers plus the students' self assessments of their learning demonstrated that the critical incidences were "powerful" and that students understood the value of being a responsible member of the neighbourhood. Students were able to connect the experiences of litter in the neighbourhood to the value of not littering, being responsible for picking up their litter and valuing a community waste disposal system. Students understood the importance of safety and the importance of having stop signs (Seattle) and zebra (marked) crossings and signs (Sydney) to make the neighbourhood safer. The engagement level of the students was noted by both co-researching teachers and is demonstrated in the following comments from the Sydney teacher:

> *"I couldn't believe how they responded to the car accident. You could have heard a pin drop. They thought it was real. Student Y was sitting next to me and she asked 'Did it really happen?' ... I didn't think they could handle the neighbourhood meeting on their own but they were really good. That surprised me. Sitting in their family groups, they were really focussed."*

The significant learning identified in students' self assessment worksamples (see Table 5) centred around the critical incidents and the importance of cooperation for solving litter and speed problems in the neighbourhood.

Table 5
"Families" Self Assessments of Learnings in *Families in their Neighborhood*

WE learnt...	Seattle	Sydney
People need to cooperate and be a good neighbour	5[8]	2
We need to clean up and throw rubbish in bins	6	8
We can stop speeding cars with e.g. signs and crossing	1	8
How to number houses		1
How to have a meeting		1

It was not clear, however, if the Seattle students really believed that writing letters to the city government would result in government action even though the stop sign was installed in the neighbourhood. When the suggestion was made to write a letter to the Mayor to request the placement of the stop sign at the intersection, the students were dubious. The previous year the Mayor had visited the school, and students had requested that their playing field be improved. The Mayor promised to follow up at the city government level; however, no improvements were made. As students discussed this critical incident of the Storypath, they raised the playground issue from the previous year and the lack of response from the city government.

In contrast, the Sydney students demonstrated more confidence with their solution to the litter problem, i.e. a Clean Up day and more litter bins. They had participated as a school, in Clean Up Australia Day, several weeks prior to this incident. The extensive media coverage of the Day had been positive.

Significant in both of these incident solutions, is the influence of the students' previous citizenship participation successes on their understandings and efficacy levels.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study clearly show that children as young as those in Year 1 have well formed understandings about diversity amongst and within families. They also, however, have established attitudes regarding accepted norms for family structure and composition, family activities and celebrations. These attitudes include well-formed beliefs about gender roles and ethnicity. Salient in this study also, was that students' understandings and attitudes about families and norms emanate from their everyday experiences, both real and mediated. There was substantial evidence that the Seattle and Sydney students drew on their own experiences and their own child perspectives or preferences when completing the tasks for the Storypath "families" and neighbourhood. Given that the Storypath strategy calls upon students to construct their own understandings by connecting to their previous experiences or life circumstances, one would expect such outcomes.

The findings of this study, therefore, have implications for curriculum planning, including resource selection, and for the role of the teacher in implementing curriculum through constructivist approaches such as the Storypath strategy. Constructivist teaching and learning approaches encourage children to have ownership of their learning. In the Storypath strategy students construct the characters, in this unit the members of the "families", and they co-construct with the teacher, and via the characters, stories that

[8] Students were asked to list 3 learnings per "family". Some listed 2 and some 3.

provide concrete contexts for developing understandings of a wide range of knowledge and skills. Whilst, the sense of ownership of learning that the Storypath approach encourages was seen as a powerful force in engaging the students in the learning tasks at both research sites, this study clearly alludes to the important role that the teacher has when students are creating and discussing their characters, and their subsequent learning contexts. As with all constructivist approaches, the teacher's role should not be a passive one of merely accepting student responses. Rather, the teacher has a responsibility to acknowledge, probe, respond to and challenge the students' constructions in order to lead them to new information, perspectives, investigations, and answers. For example, the Storypath strategy provided a context for students to safely share their preconceived notions about gender, ethnic, and family roles. The teachers' role then was to challenge those preconceived notions and present other ways of thinking about such roles thus extending students' understanding of family and community.

In this study of the *Families in their Neighborhood* unit, for example, to not raise questions about the children's beliefs about gender roles and ethnicity, or about the importance of diverse ethnic holidays, only reinforces what the children have already learned through their everyday, and mostly mainstream, experiences. Surely, this is not the aim of schooling in diverse civil societies such as the U.S.A. and Australia.

Given the power of the sense of ownership of learning identified in this study, it is imperative that teachers do not undermine what children bring to the learning situation when engaging them in challenges to their beliefs and understandings. The use of collaborative groups, such as the "families" groups in this Storypath unit, can serve as a vehicle for enabling children to tackle problems with others. Because they have worked collaboratively, the students do not feel alone when the teacher challenges beliefs expressed by their group or "family". Further, they have opportunities to interact with their peers, clarify their own thinking and reach conclusions and solutions that they may not have reached alone and prior to the teachers' challenge.

The students in the two research sites of this study responded positively to their family and neighbourhood citizenship responsibilities. They were focussed in solving the problems and in making their communities better places. Clearly, curriculum planners and teachers should be capitalizing on these citizenship experiences so that such experiences can be developed with further sophistication as students mature. Promotion of informed citizenship opportunities is particularly pertinent in both the USA and Australian contexts in which the emphases have been on literacy and numeracy often to the detriment of Social Studies education.

The Year 1 students in this study responded in a fairly sophisticated manner when solving the neighbourhood problems. They understood that families in neighbourhoods have to work together to solve problems. They felt that they had learnt a worthwhile strategy when they cooperated in the neighbourhood meeting as a group of families. Developing a disposition towards the concept of working together, lays a strong foundation for citizens working out neighbourhood problems in the future. Given that neighbourhood disputes can often result in neighbours suing neighbours over overgrown trees, roadways, pets, and so forth, valuing the ability for neighbours to work on problems together is worthwhile. Obvious in the meetings, however, was the influence of the students' personal experiences of success with previous citizenship actions. Ensuring that children have experiences of success when working together is valuable in developing the disposition towards citizenship. Fostering students' skills and dispositions towards working together to solve problems and engage in citizenship activities are essential to

healthy democracies. It is essential that these skills and dispositions be developed when students care deeply about fairness and justice and are not jaded by the failure of democracy to live up to its ideals.

Limitations of the study and where to next

The results and conclusions of this study emanate from two classrooms in two communities only. The communities were similar in socio-economic levels and ethnicity. The generalisability of the findings is, therefore, limited. It may be of interest to explore some of the issues raised about children's understandings of and attitudes towards diversity in a greater range of classrooms, including classrooms in more affluent and less diverse communities. Further exploration of young children's understanding of citizenship is warranted given both countries' multicultural makeup and low participation in citizenship activities especially in low-socio-economic communities.

Appendix 1
Observation of Seattle Classroom

Date of Lesson: January 8
Teacher: What are family holidays? Let's brainstorm.
Student responses: Hanukkah
Christmas
Thanksgiving--turkey day
Easter
Halloween
Valentine's Day
Mother's Day and Father's Day
Children's Day--Sister Day and Brother Day
Presidents' Day
New Years Day
Teacher: Is there another kind of New Years Day?
Student responses Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday
St. Nicholas Day
Teacher: Is there a lunar day celebrated in January?
Student responses: Winter solstice
Summer solstice
Teacher: I want you to stop and think about a holiday in January or February. The dragon is part of the holiday. What is the holiday called?
Student response: Chinese New Year

Appendix 2
Focus Group Interview questions

- Tell me about your family again.
- Why did you draw these members of the family?
- Could you have drawn other members?
- Tell me about who does the different jobs in your family.
- Could people in the family change jobs or could other people in the family do some of the jobs (to check gender stereotyping etc)?
- Do you think your family will change? How might it change? (to check understanding of why families change)
- Is your family important to the neighbourhood? How? (to check any notions of neighbourhood citizenship)
- What were three things you learned from the Families in the Neighbourhood unit.

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